

## Mother Teresa: A Case Study in Christian Mental Health Stigma

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### Presentation Outline

1. Introduction to mental health stigma
2. Catholic commentary on Mother Teresa's mental health
3. How Catholic commentaries perpetuate mental health stigma
4. Trends in U.S. Christian views of mental health
5. Resisting Christian mental health stigma

### Two Representative Examples of Catholic Commentary

#### Example from Kerry Walters

"It's also quite probably true, given the nature of her work among the poorest of the poor, that at times Teresa felt psychologically depressed or burnt out... But to conclude that the darkness was the result of depression, much less loss of faith, is to overlook its [spiritual significance](#). Psychological depression is [me-centered](#); the depressive's gaze is [always directed inward](#). Teresa's, on the other hand, was [directed outward, to the God](#) whose absence she so keenly felt. Depression renders a sufferer [listless](#); Mother Teresa was [always on the go, doing the work to which she felt God had called her](#)."<sup>1</sup>

#### Example from Therese Borchard

"I spent a week with Mother Teresa and her Sisters in the winter of 1994. I stood beside her for about two hours as we distributed Christmas gifts to orphaned children. I sensed a sadness in her. But her [light overshadowed it](#). Unlike a person wrapped in severe depression, [wearing the expression of despair](#), she [exuded light and hope](#). When she prayed, [her deep love for God was visible, even contagious](#)."<sup>2</sup>

### Additional Resources on Christian Mental Health Stigma

- Marcia Webb, *Toward a Theology of Psychological Disorder* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017).
- John Swinton, *Finding Jesus in the Storm: The Spiritual Lives of Christians with Mental Health Challenges* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020).
- David Finnegan-Hosey, *Christ on the Psych Ward* (New York: Church Publishing, 2018).

<sup>1</sup> Kerry Walters, "Mother Teresa: Saint Who Conquered Darkness," *Franciscan Spirit* (July 17, 2016), <https://blog.franciscanmedia.org/franciscan-spirit/mother-teresa-a-saint-who-conquered-darkness>.

<sup>2</sup> Therese J. Borchard, "Mother Teresa: My Saint of Darkness and Hope," *Beyond Blue* (August 2007), <https://www.beliefnet.com/columnists/beyondblue/2007/08/mother-teresa-my-saint-of-dark.html>.